Brief Statement of LCMS Doctrinal Position

Doctrinal Positions of the LCMS

‘Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’

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Topics

Of the Holy Scriptures

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1. We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called "theological deduction," but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16, John 10:35, Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.
2. We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by

which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged. — With the Confessions of our Church we teach also that the "rule of faith" (analogia fidei) according to which the Holy Scriptures are to be understood are the clear passages of the Scriptures themselves which set forth the individual doctrines. (Apology. Triglot, p. 441, Paragraph 60; Mueller, p. 684). The rule of faith is not the man-made so-called "totality of Scripture" ("Ganzes der Schrift").

3. We reject the doctrine which under the name of science has gained wide popularity in the Church of our day that Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, but in part the Word of God and in part the word of man and hence does, or at least, might contain error. We reject this erroneous doctrine as horrible and blasphemous, since it flatly contradicts Christ and His holy apostles, set up men as judges over the Word of God, and thus overthrows the foundation of the Christian Church and its faith.

Of God

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4. On the basis of the Holy Scriptures we teach the sublime article of the Holy Trinity; that is, we teach that the one true God, Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, is the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, three distinct persons, but of one and the same divine essence, equal in power, equal in eternity, equal in majesty, because each person possesses the one divine essence entire, Col. 2:9, Matt. 28:19. We hold that all teachers and communions that deny the doctrine of the Holy Trinity are outside the pale of the Christian Church. The Triune God is the God who is gracious to man, John 3:16-18, 1 Cor. 12:3. Since the Fall, no man can believe in the "fatherhood" of God except he believe in the eternal Son of God, who became man and reconciled us to God by His vicarious satisfaction, 1 John 2:23; John 14:6. Hence we warn against Unitarianism, which in our country has to a great extent impenetrated the sects and is being spread particularly also through the influence of the lodges.

Of Creation

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5. We teach that God has created heaven and earth, and that in the manner and in the space of time recorded in the Holy Scriptures, especially Gen. 1 and 2, namely, by His almighty creative word, and in six days. We reject every doctrine which denies or limits the work of creation as taught in Scripture. In

our days it is denied or limited by those who assert, ostensibly in deference to science, that the world came into existence through a process of evolution; that is, that it has, in immense periods of time, developed more or less of itself. Since no man was present when it pleased God to create the world, we must look for a reliable account of creation to God's own record, found in God's own book, the Bible. We accept God's own record with full confidence and confess with Luther's Catechism: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures."

Of Man and Sin

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6. We teach that the first man was not brutelike nor merely capable of intellectual development, but that God created man in His own image, Gen. 1:26, 27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, that is, in true knowledge of God and in true righteousness and holiness and endowed with a truly scientific knowledge of nature, Gen. 2:19-23.
7. We furthermore teach that sin came into the world by the fall of the first man, as described [sic] Gen. 3. By this Fall not only he himself, but also his natural offspring have lost the original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and thus all men are sinners already by birth, dead in sins, inclined to all evil, and subject to the wrath of God, Rom. 5:12, 18; Eph. 2:1-3. We teach also that men are unable, through any efforts of their own or by the aid of "culture and science," to reconcile themselves to God and thus conquer death and damnation.

Of Redemption

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8. We teach that in the fullness of time the eternal Son of God was made man by assuming, from the Virgin Mary through the operation of the Holy Ghost, a human nature like unto ours, yet without sin, and receiving it unto His divine person. Jesus Christ is therefore "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary," true God and true man in one undivided and indivisible person. The purpose of this miraculous incarnation of the Son of God was that He might become the Mediator between God and men, both fulfilling the divine Law and suffering and dying in the place of mankind. In this manner God reconciled the whole sinful world unto Himself, Gal. 4:4, 5; 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19.

Of Faith in Christ

9. Since God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself through the vicarious life and death of His Son and has commanded that the reconciliation effected by Christ be proclaimed to men in the Gospel, to the end that they may believe it, 2 Cor. 5:18, 19; Rom. 1:5, therefore faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of sins, as both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures testify, Acts 10:43; John 3:16-18, 36. By this faith in Christ, through which men obtain the forgiveness of sins, is not meant any human effort to fulfill the Law of God after the example of Christ, but faith in the Gospel, that is, in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, which was fully earned for us by Christ and is offered by the Gospel. This faith justifies, not inasmuch as it is a work of man, but inasmuch as it lays hold of the grace offered, the forgiveness of sins, Rom. 4:16.

Of Conversion

10. We teach that conversion consists in this, that a man, having learned from the Law of God that he is a lost and condemned sinner, is brought to faith in the Gospel, which offers him forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, Acts 11:21; Luke 24:46, 47; Acts 26:18.
11. All men, since the Fall, are dead in sins, Eph. 2:1-3, and inclined only to evil, Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Rom. 8:7. For this reason, and particularly because men regard the Gospel of Christ, crucified for the sins of the world, as foolishness, 1 Cor. 2:14, faith in the Gospel, or conversion to God, is neither wholly nor in the least part the work of man, but the work of God's grace and almighty power alone, Phil. 1:29; Eph. 2:8; 1:19; Jer. 31:18. Hence Scripture call the faith of men, or his conversion, a raising from the dead, Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12, a being born of God, John 1:12, 13, a new birth by the Gospel, 1 Peter 1:23-25, a work of God like the creation of light at the creation of the world, 2 Cor. 4:6.
12. On the basis of these clear statements of the Holy Scriptures we reject every kind of synergism, that is, the doctrine that conversion is wrought not by the grace and power of God alone, but in part also by the co-operation of man himself, by man's right conduct, his right attitude, his right self-determination, his lesser guilt or less evil conduct as compared with others, his refraining from willful resistance, or anything else whereby man's

conversion and salvation is taken out of the gracious hands of God and made to depend on what man does or leaves undone. For this refraining from willful resistance or from any kind of resistance is also solely a work of grace, which "changes unwilling into willing men," Ezek. 36:26; Phil. 2:13. We reject also the doctrine that man is able to decide for conversion through "powers imparted by grace," since this doctrine presupposes that before conversion man still possesses spiritual powers by which he can make the right use of such "powers imparted by grace."

13. On the other hand, we reject also the Calvinistic perversion of the doctrine of conversion, that is, the doctrine that God does not desire to convert and save all hearers of the Word, but only a portion of them. Many hearers of the Word indeed remain unconverted and are not saved, not because God does not earnestly desire their conversion and salvation, but solely because they stubbornly resist the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost, as Scripture teaches, Acts 7:51; Matt. 23:37; Acts 13:46.
14. As to the question why not all men are converted and saved, seeing that God's grace is universal and all men are equally and utterly corrupt, we confess that we cannot answer it. From Scripture we know only this: A man owes his conversion and salvation, not to any lesser guilt or better conduct on his part, but solely to the grace of God. But any man's non-conversion is due to himself alone; it is the result of his obstinate resistance against the converting operation of the Holy Ghost. Hos. 13:9.
15. Our refusal to go beyond what is revealed in these two Scriptural truths is not "masked Calvinism" ("Crypto- Calvinism") but precisely the Scriptural teaching of the Lutheran Church as it is presented in detail in the Formula of Concord (Triglot, p. 1081, paragraphs 57-59, 60b, 62, 63; M. p. 716f.): "That one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again, etc. — in these and similar questions Paul fixes a certain limit to us how far we should go, namely, that in the one part we should recognize God's judgment. For they are well-deserved penalties of sins when God so punished a land or nation for despising His Word that the punishment extends also to their posterity, as is to be seen in the Jews. And thereby God in some lands and persons exhibits His severity to those that are His in order to indicate what we all would have well deserved and would be worthy and worth, since we act wickedly in opposition to God's Word and often grieve the Holy Ghost sorely; in order that we may live in the fear of God and acknowledge and praise God's goodness, to the exclusion of, and contrary to, our merit in and with us, to whom He gives His Word and with whom He leaves it and whom He does not harden and reject...And this

His righteous, well-deserved judgment He displays in some countries, nations and persons in order that, when we are placed alongside of them and compared with them (quam simillimi illis deprehensi, i.e., and found to be most similar to them), we may learn the more diligently to recognize and praise God's pure, unmerited grace in the vessels of mercy…When we proceed thus far in this article, we remain on the right way, as it is written, Hos. 13:9: 'O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help.' However, as regards these things in this disputation which would soar too high and beyond these limits, we should with Paul place the finger upon our lips and remember and say, Rom. 9:20: 'O man, who art thou that repliest against God?'" The Formula of Concord describes the mystery which confronts us here not as a mystery in man's heart (a "psychological" mystery), but teaches that, when we try to understand why "one is hardened, blinded, given over to a reprobate mind, while another, who is indeed in the same guilt, is converted again," we enter the domain of the unsearchable judgments of God and ways past finding out, which are not revealed to us in His Word, but which we shall know in eternal life. 1 Cor. 13:12.

16. Calvinists solve this mystery, which God has not revealed in His Word, by denying the universality of grace; synergists, by denying that salvation is by grace alone. Both solutions are utterly vicious, since they contradict Scripture and since every poor sinner stands in need of, and must cling to, both the unrestricted universal grace and the unrestricted "by grace alone," lest he despair and perish.

Of Justification

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17. Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of justification. Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ, Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 4:25; that therefore not for the sake of their good works, but without the works of the Law, by grace, for Christ's sake, He justifies, that is, accounts as righteous, all those who believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven. Thus the Holy Ghost testifies through St. Paul: "There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," Rom. 3:23, 24. And again: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by

faith without the deeds of the Law," Rom. 3:28.

18. Through this doctrine alone Christ is given the honor due Him, namely, that through His holy life and innocent suffering and death He is our Savior. And through this doctrine alone can poor sinners have the abiding comfort that God is assuredly gracious to them. We reject as apostasy from the Christian religion all doctrines whereby man's own works and merit are mingled into the article of justification before God. For the Christian religion is the faith that we have forgiveness of sins and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, Acts 10:43.
19. We reject as apostasy from the Christian religion not only the doctrine of the Unitarians, who promise the grace of God to men on the basis of their moral efforts; not only the gross work-doctrine of the papists, who expressly teach that good works are necessary to obtain justification; but also the doctrine of the synergists, who indeed use the terminology of the Christian Church and say that man is justified "by faith," "by faith alone," but again mix human works into the article of justification by ascribing to man a co-operation with God in the kindling of faith and thus stray into papistic territory.

Of Good Works

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20. Before God only those works are good which are done for the glory of God and the good of man, according to the rule of divine Law. Such works, however, no man performs unless he first believes that God has forgiven him his sins and has given him eternal life by grace, for Christ's sake, without any works of his own, John 15:4, 5. We reject as a great folly the assertion, frequently made in our day, that works must be placed in the fore, and "faith in dogmas" — meaning the Gospel of Christ crucified for the sins of the world — must be relegated to the rear. Since good works never precede faith, but are always and in every instance the result of faith in the Gospel, it is evident that the only means by which we Christians can become rich in good works (and God would have us to be rich in good works, Titus 2:14) is unceasingly to remember the grace of God which we have received in Christ, Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 8:9. Hence we reject as unchristian and foolish any attempt to produce good works by the compulsion of the Law or through carnal motives.

Of the Means of Grace

21. Although God is present and operates everywhere throughout all creation and the whole earth is therefore full of the temporal bounties and blessings of God, Col. 1:17; Acts 17:28; 14:17, still we hold with Scripture that God offers and communicates to men the spiritual blessings purchased by Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the treasures and gifts connected therewith, only through the external means of grace ordained by Him. These means of grace are the Word of the Gospel, in every form in which it is brought to man, and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of the Lord's Supper. The Word of the gospel promises and applies the grace of God, works faith and thus regenerates man, and gives the Holy Ghost, Acts 20:24; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Gal. 3:2. Baptism, too, is applied for the remission of sins and is therefore a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5. Likewise the object of the Lord's Supper, that is, of the ministration of the body and blood of Christ, is none other than the communication and sealing of the forgiveness of sins, as the words declare: "Given for you," and: "Shed for you for the remission of sins," Luke 22:19, 20; Matt. 26:28, and "This cup is the New Testament in My blood," 1 Cor. 11:23; Jer. 31:31-34 ("New Covenant").
22. Since it is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation purchased by Christ, the Christian Church must not remain at home with the means of grace entrusted to it, but go into the whole world with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16. For the same reason also the churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the Church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace. Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as "new methods," unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm the Church.
23. We reject as a dangerous error the doctrine, which disrupted the Church of the Reformation, that the grace and the Spirit of God are communicated not through the external means ordained by Him, but by an immediate operation of grace. This erroneous doctrine bases the forgiveness of sins, or justification, upon a fictitious "infused grace," that is, upon a quality of man, and thus again establishes the work-doctrine of the papists.

Of the Church

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24. We believe that there is one holy Christian Church on earth, the Head of which is Christ and which is gathered, preserved, and governed by Christ through the Gospel.

    The members of the Christian Church are the Christians, that is, all those who have despaired of their own righteousness before God and believe that God forgives their sins for Christ's sake. The Christian Church, in the proper sense of the term, is composed of believers only, Acts 5:14; 26:18; which means that no person in whom the Holy Ghost has wrought faith in the Gospel, or — which is the same thing — in the doctrine of justification, can be divested of his membership in the Christian Church; and, on the other hand, that no person in whose heart this faith does not dwell can be invested with such membership. All unbelievers, though they be in external communion with the Church and even hold the office of teacher or any other office in the Church, are not members of the Church, but, on the contrary, dwelling-places and instruments of Satan, Eph. 2:2. This is also the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions: "It is certain, however, that the wicked are in the power of the devil and members of the kingdom of the devil, as Paul teaches, Eph. 2:2, when he says that 'the devil now worketh in the children of disobedience,' " etc. (Apology, Triglot, p. 231, Paragraph 16; M., p. 154.)

25. Since it is by faith in the Gospel alone that men become members of the Christian Church, and since this faith cannot be seen by men, but is known to God alone, 1 Kings 8:39; Acts 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:19, therefore the Christian Church on earth is invisible till Judgment Day, Col. 3:3, 4. In our day some Lutherans speak of two sides of the Church, taking the means of grace to be its "visible side." It is true, the means of grace are necessarily related to the Church, seeing that the Church is created and preserved through them. But the means of grace are not for that reason a part of the Church; for the Church, in the proper sense of the word, consists only of believers, Eph. 2:19, 20; Acts 5:14. Lest we abet the notion that the Christian Church in the proper sense of the term is an external institution, we shall continue to call the means of grace the "marks" of the Church. Just as wheat is to be found only where it has been sown, so the Church can be found only where the Word of God is in use.
26. We teach that this Church, which is the invisible communion of all believers,

is to be found not only in those external church communions which teach the Word of God purely in every part, but also where, along with error, so much of the Word of God still remains that men may be brought to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has gained for all men, Mark 16:16; Samaritans: Luke 17:16; John 4:25.

27. Local Churches or Local Congregations. — Holy Scripture, however, does not speak merely of the one Church, which embraces the believers of all places, as in Matt. 16:18; John 10:16, but also of churches in the plural, that is, of local churches, as in 1 Cor. 16:19; 1:2; Acts 8:1: the Churches of Asia, the church of God in Corinth, the church in Jerusalem. But this does not mean that there are two kinds of churches, for the local churches also, in as far as they are churches, consist solely of believers, as we see clearly from the addresses of the epistles to local churches; for example, "unto the church which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified, in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," 1 Cor. 1:2, Rom. 1:7, etc. The visible society, containing hypocrites as well as believers, is called a church only in an improper sense, Matt. 13:47-50, 24-30, 38-43.
28. On Church-Fellowship. — Since God ordained that His Word only, without the admixture of human doctrine, be taught and believed in the Christian Church, 1 Peter 4:11; John 8:31, 32; 1 Tim. 6:3, 4, all Christians are required by God to discriminate between orthodox and heterodox church-bodies, Matt. 7:15, to have church-fellowship only with orthodox church-bodies, and, in case they have strayed into heterodox church-bodies, to leave them, Rom. 16:17. We repudiate unionism, that is, church-fellowship with the adherents of false doctrine, as disobedience to God's command, as causing divisions in the Church, Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9, 10, and involving the constant danger of losing the Word of God entirely, 2 Tim. 2:17-21.
29. The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; 1 Tim. 1:3.
30. The Original and True Possessors of All Christian Rights and Privileges — Since the Christians are the Church, it is self-evident that they alone originally possess the spiritual gifts and rights which Christ has gained for, and given to, His Church. Thus St. Paul reminds all believers: "All things are yours," 1 Cor. 3:21, 22, and Christ Himself commits to all believers the keys of

the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:13-19, 18:17-20; John 20:22, 23, and commissions all believers to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. Accordingly, we reject all doctrines by which this spiritual power or any part thereof is adjudged as originally vested in certain individuals or bodies, such as the Pope, or the bishops, or the order of the ministry, or the secular lords, or councils, or synods, etc. The officers of the Church publicly administer their offices only by virtue of delegated powers, and such administration remains under the supervision of the latter, Col. 4:17. Naturally all Christians have also the right and the duty to judge and decide matters of doctrine, not according to their own notions, of course, but according to the Word of God, 1 John 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:11.

Of the Public Ministry

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31. By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of a Christian congregation. Concerning this office we teach that it is a divine ordinance; that is, the Christians of a certain locality must apply the means of grace not only privately and within the circle of their families nor merely in their common intercourse with fellow-Christians, John 5:39; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:16, but they are also required, by the divine order, to make provision that the Word of God be publicly preached in their midst, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, by persons qualified for such work, whose qualifications and official functions are exactly defined in Scripture, Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 20:28; 2 Tim. 2:2.
32. Although the office of the ministry is a divine ordinance, it possesses no other power than the power of the Word of God, 1 Pet. 4:11; that is to say, it is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever, and as long as, the minister proclaims to them the Word of God, Heb. 13:17, Luke 10:16. If, however, 6:30-8:30 the minister, in his teachings and injunctions, were to go beyond the Word of God, it would be the duty of Christians not to obey, but to disobey him, so as to remain faithful to Christ, Matt. 23:8. Accordingly, we reject the false doctrine ascribing to the office of the ministry the right to demand obedience and submission in matters which Christ has not commanded.
33. Regarding ordination we teach that it is not a divine, but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance. (Smalcald Articles. Triglot, p. 525, paragraph 70; M.,

p. 342.)

Of Church and State

34. Although both Church and State are ordinances of God, yet they must not be commingled. Church and State have entirely different aims. By the Church, God would save men, for which reason the Church is called the "mother" of believers, Gal. 4:26. By the State, God would maintain external order among men, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," 1 Tim. 2:2. It follows that the means which the Church and State employ to gain their ends are entirely different. The Church may not employ any other means than the preaching of the Word of God, John 18:11, 36; 2 Cor. 10:4. The State, on the other hand, makes laws bearing on civil matters and is empowered to employ for their execution also the sword and other corporal punishments, Rom. 13:4.

    Accordingly we condemn the policy of those who would have the power of the State employed "in the interest of the Church" and who thus turn the Church into a secular dominion; as also of those who, aiming to govern the State by the Word of God, seek to turn the State into a Church.

Of the Election of Grace

35. By the election of grace we mean this truth, that all those who by the grace of God alone, for Christ's sake, through the means of grace, are brought to faith, are justified, sanctified, and preserved in faith here in time, that all these have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation in faith, and this for the same reason, namely, by grace alone, for Christ's sake, and by way of the means of grace. That this is the doctrine of the Holy Scripture is evident from Eph. 1:3-7; 2 Thess. 2:13, 14; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 2 Tim. 1:9; Matt. 24:22-24 (cp. Form. of Conc. Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraphs 5, 8, 23; M., p. 705).
36. Accordingly we reject as an anti-Scriptural error the doctrine that not alone the grace of God and the merit of Christ are the cause of the election of grace, but that God has, in addition, found or regarded something good in us which prompted or caused Him to elect us, this being variously designated as "good

works," "right conduct," "proper self-determination," "refraining from willful resistance," etc. Nor does Holy Scripture know of an election "by foreseen faith," "in view of faith," as though the faith of the elect were to be placed before their election; but according to Scripture the faith which the elect have in time belongs to the spiritual blessings with which God has endowed them by His eternal election. For Scripture teaches Acts 13:48: "And as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed." Our Lutheran Confession also testifies (Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraph 8; M. p. 705): "The eternal election of God however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this our salvation is so founded that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, Matt. 16:18, as is written John 10:28: 'Neither shall any man pluck My sheep out of My hand'; and again, Acts 13:48: 'And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' "

37. But as earnestly as we maintain that there is an election of grace, or a predestination to salvation, so decidedly do we teach, on the other hand, that there is no election of wrath, or predestination to damnation. Scripture plainly reveals the truth that the love of God for the world of lost sinners is universal, that is, that it embraces all men without exception, that Christ has fully reconciled all men unto God, and that God earnestly desires to bring all men to faith, to preserve them therein, and thus to save them, as Scripture testifies, 1 Tim. 2:4: "God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." No man is lost because God has predestined him to eternal damnation. — Eternal election is a cause why the elect are brought to faith in time, Acts 13:48; but election is not a cause why men remain unbelievers when they hear the Word of God. The reason assigned by Scripture for this sad fact is that these men judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, putting the Word of God from them and obstinately resisting the Holy Ghost, whose earnest will it is to bring also them to repentance and faith by means of the Word, Act 13:46; 7:51; Matt. 23:37.
38. To be sure, it is necessary to observe the Scriptural distinction between the election of grace and the universal will of grace. This universal gracious will of God embraces all men; the election of grace, however, does not embrace all, but only a definite number, whom "God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation," 2 Thess. 2:13, the "remnant," the "seed" which "the Lord left," Rom. 9:27- 29, the "election," Rom. 11:7; and while the universal will of grace is frustrated in the case of most men, Matt. 22:14; Luke 7:30, the election of grace attains its end with all whom it embraces, Rom. 8:28-30. Scripture,

however, while distinguishing between the universal will of grace and the election of grace, does not place the two in opposition to each other. On the contrary, it teaches that the grace dealing with those who are lost is altogether earnest and fully efficacious for conversion. Blind reason indeed declares these two truths to be contradictory; but we impose silence on our reason. The seeming disharmony will disappear in the light of heaven, 1 Cor. 13:12.

39. Furthermore, by election of grace, Scripture does not mean that one part of God's counsel of salvation according to which He will receive into heaven those who persevere in faith unto the end, but, on the contrary, Scripture means this, that God, before the foundation of the world, from pure grace, because of the redemption of Christ, has chosen for His own a definite number of persons out of the corrupt mass and has determined to bring them through Word and Sacrament, to faith and salvation.
40. Christians can and should be assured of their eternal election. This is evident from the fact that Scripture addresses them as the chosen ones and comforts them with their election, Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13. This assurance of one's personal election, however, springs only from faith in the Gospel, from the assurance that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; on the contrary, through the life, suffering, and death of His Son He fully reconciled the whole world of sinners unto Himself. Faith in this truth leaves no room for the fear that God might still harbor thoughts of wrath and damnation concerning us. Scripture inculcates that in Rom. 8:32, 33: "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Luther's pastoral advice is therefore in accord with Scripture: "Gaze upon the wounds of Christ and the blood shed for you; there predestination will shine forth." (St. Louis ed., II, 181; on Gen. 26:9) That the Christian obtains the personal assurance of his eternal election in this way is taught also by our Lutheran Confessions (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1071, Paragraph 26, M. 709): "Of this we should not judge according to our reason nor according to the Law or from any external appearance. Neither should we attempt to investigate the secret, concealed abyss of divine predestination, but should give heed to the revealed will of God. For He has made known unto us the mystery of His will and made it manifest through Christ that it might be preached, Eph. 1:9ff.; 2 Tim. 1:9f." — In order to insure the proper method of viewing eternal election and the Christian's assurance

of it, the Lutheran Confessions set forth at length the principle that election is not to be considered "in a bare manner (nude), as though God only held a muster, thus: 'This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned' " (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1065, Paragraph 9; M., p. 706); but "the Scriptures teach this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word, Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor. 1:7; exhort to repentance, 2 Tim. 3:16; urge to godliness, Eph. 1:14; John 15:3; strengthen faith and assure us of our salvation, Eph. 1:13; John 10:27f.; 2 Thess. 2:13f." (Formula of Concord, Triglot, p. 1067, Paragraph 12; M., p. 707). — To sum up, just as God in time draws the Christian unto Himself through the Gospel, so He has already in His eternal election endowed them with "sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth," 2 Thess. 2:13. Therefore: If, by the grace of God, you believe in the Gospel of the forgiveness of your sins for Christ's sake, you are to be certain that you also belong to the number of God's elect, even as Scripture, 2 Thess. 2:13, addresses the believing Thessalonians as the chosen of God and gives thanks to God for their election.

Of Sunday

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41. We teach that in the New Testament God has abrogated the Sabbath and all the holy days prescribed for the Church of the Old Covenant, so that neither "the keeping of the Sabbath nor any other day" nor the observance of at least one specific day of the seven days of the week is ordained or commanded by God, Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5 (Augsburg Confession, Triglot, p. 91, Paragraphs 51-60; M., p. 66).

    The observance of Sunday and other church festivals is an ordinance of the Church, made by virtue of Christian liberty. (Augsburg Confession, Triglot, p. 91, Paragraphs 51-53, 60; M., p. 66; Large Catechism, Triglot, p. 603, Paragraphs 83, 85, 89, M., p. 401.) Hence Christians should not regard such ordinances as ordained by God and binding upon the conscience, Col. 2:16; Gal. 4:10. However, for the sake of Christian love and peace they should willingly observe them, Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 14:40. (Augsburg Confession, Triglot, p. 91, Paragraphs 53-56; M., p. 67.)

Of the Millenium

42. With the Augsburg Confession (Art. XVII) we reject every type of millennialism, or Chiliasm, the opinions that Christ will return visibly to this earth a thousand years before the end of the world and establish a dominion of the Church over the world; or that before the end of the world the Church is to enjoy a season of special prosperity; or that before a general resurrection on Judgment Day a number of departed Christians or martyrs are to be raised again to reign in glory in this world; or that before the end of the world a universal conversion of the Jewish nation (of Israel according to the flesh) will take place.

    Over against this, Scripture clearly teaches, and we teach accordingly, that the kingdom of Christ on earth will remain under the cross until the end of the world, Act 14:22; John 16:33; 18:36; Luke 9:23; 14:27; 17:20-37; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 12:28; Luke 18:8; that the second visible coming of the Lord will be His final advent, His coming to judge the quick and the dead, Matt. 24:29, 30; 25:31; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 9:26-28; that there will be but one resurrection of the dead, John 5:28; 6:39, 40; that the time of the Last Day is, and will remain, unknown, Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:32, 37; Acts 1:7, which would not be the case if the Last Day were to come a thousand years after the beginning of a millennium; and that there will be no general conversion, a conversion en masse, of the Jewish nation, Rom. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:14; Rom. 11:25; 1 Thess. 2:16.

    According to these clear passages of Scripture we reject the whole of Millennialism, since it not only contradicts Scripture, but also engenders a false conception of the kingdom of Christ, turns the hope of Christians upon earthly goals, 1 Cor. 15:19; Col. 3:2, and leads them to look upon the Bible as an obscure book.

Of the Antichrist

43. As to the Antichrist we teach that the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 John 2:18, have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his dominion. All the features of the Antichrist as drawn in these prophecies, including the most abominable and horrible ones, for example, that the Antichrist "as God sitteth in the temple of God," 2 Thess.

2:4; that he anathematizes the very heart of the Gospel of Christ, that is, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, through faith alone, without any merit or worthiness in man (Rom. 3:20-28; Gal. 2:16); that he recognizes only those as members of the Christian Church who bow to his authority; and that, like a deluge, he had inundated the whole Church with his antichristian doctrines till God revealed him through the Reformation — these very features are the outstanding characteristics of the Papacy. (Cf. Smalcald Articles, Triglot, p. 515, Paragraphs 39-41; p. 401, Paragraph 45; M. pp. 336, 258.) Hence we subscribe to the statement of our Confessions that the Pope is "the very Antichrist." (Smalcald Articles, Triglot, p. 475, Paragraph 10; M., p. 308.)

Please read our response to this Frequently Asked Question.

Of Open Questions

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44. Those questions in the domain of Christian doctrine may be termed open questions which Scripture answers either not at all or not clearly. Since neither an individual nor the Church as a whole is permitted to develop or augment the Christian doctrine, but are rather ordered and commanded by God to continue in the doctrine of the apostles, 2 Thess. 2:15; Acts 2:42, open questions must remain open questions. — Not to be included in the number of open questions are the following: The doctrine of the Church and the Ministry, of Sunday, of Chiliasm, and of Antichrist, these doctrines being clearly defined in Scripture.

Of the Symbols of the Lutheran Church

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45. We accept as our confession all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. — The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines.
46. Since the Christian Church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of

Holy Scripture itself.

47. Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not "in so far as," but "because," the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church.
48. The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated ex professo, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines. The obligation does not extend to historical questions, "purely exegetical questions," and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All doctrines of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture.

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